

WASHINGTON, D.C. - U.S. Representative Charlie Melancon announced today \$3,045,000 in private grant money and a matching federal grant will be distributed to Louisiana for a wetlands restoration project in St. John the Baptist and Tangipahoa Parishes. Using \$2,095,000 from the R.K. Mellon Foundation and a \$950,000 matching federal grant, the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries will acquire two privately-owned parcels of land to add a total of 2,530 acres of protected habitat to the Maurepas Swamp Wildlife Management Area adjacent to Lakes Maurepas and Pontchartrain. May 17, 2007
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"These grants to protect the wetlands around Lake Maurepas and Lake Pontchartrain could not have come at a better time, as development in St. John has exploded since the storms of 2005," said Rep. Melancon. **"While rapid commercial and residential development has been a boon for St. John's economy, we must work quickly to protect the valuable wetlands in the parish that are part of Louisiana's natural beauty and uniqueness. My goal is to protect not only the people of south Louisiana, but also the environment in which they live and work. I will continue supporting legislation that promotes the conservation of our natural habitats, while encouraging smart growth and development."**

The Maurepas/Pontchartrain Habitat Conservation Effort and other wetlands conservation projects are made possible through private donations and a matching federal grant program authorized by the North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA), which Rep. Melancon co-sponsored the reauthorization of in 2006. The reauthorization (H.R. 5539) subsequently was signed into law last fall.

The NAWCA program provides matching grants to organizations and individuals who have developed partnerships to carry out wetlands conservation projects in the United States, Canada, and Mexico for the benefit of wetlands-associated migratory birds and other wildlife. First enacted in 1989, NAWCA has funded thousands of conservations projects that have protected millions of acres of wetlands in the United States.

The R.K. Mellon Foundation previously donated 62,500 acres of bald cypress/tupelo wetlands in coastal Louisiana to the state of Louisiana for the Maurepas Swamp Wildlife Management Area, which became an important conservation "anchor" on the southern side of Lake Maurepas and inspired additional land conservation.

The grants announced today will fund the next phase of the Maurepas/Pontchartrain Habitat Conservation Effort. In this phase, the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries will build upon previous accomplishments by acquiring Salmen Corporation's 930-acre parcel and Rogers Land Corporation's 1,600-acre parcel through a combination of fee simple purchase and donation, protecting a total of 2,530 acres of habitat adjacent to Lakes Maurepas and Pontchartrain. Both project parcels contain open swamp with patches of bottomland cypress/tupelo forested areas, and will serve to link the Maurepas Swamp and Joyce/Manchac Wildlife Management Areas. Lake Maurepas is a freshwater system, while Lake Pontchartrain is brackish; safeguarding the wetland ecosystems between and around them is crucial to maintaining each lake's unique hydrology and resources.

Aside from protecting our ecosystems and wildlife, the wetlands and coastal barriers that these funds will help to conserve can also protect the safety of Louisianans. According to the U.S. Geological Survey, for every 2.7 miles a hurricane travels across marshes and wetlands, the storm surge is reduced by one foot.

In co-sponsoring reauthorization of NAWCA last summer, Rep. Melancon commented, **"As a sportsman, I value protecting our fish and wildlife habitats. But as a Louisianan, I understand that conserving our coastal wetlands can be a matter of life or death."**

The funds for this project are administered to the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries by the United States Fish and Wildlife Services. The process is a very competitive one, in which non-federal monies are provided by partners in order to leverage more federal funds. Once funds have been matched and partnered, the North American Wetlands Conservation Council must then make its recommendations, and the funds are then approved by the Migratory Bird Conservation for distribution.

Since enactment in 1989, NAWCA has funded more than 1,500 conservation projects involving more than 3,200 partners. As a result, more than 23 million acres of wetlands and associated habitat has been protected, restored or enhanced in the United States, Canada

and Mexico.

In Louisiana, NAWCA has helped fund projects that have conserved, restored, or enhanced over 488,000 acres of wildlife habitat - the third most in the country. Since 1990, Louisiana has received over \$90 million in program funds for conservation projects, the majority of which was from private partners.

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